

The Department of Agriculture has a surprising number of activities directed toward improvement in the physical and social environment. These include rural renewal, housing, electrification, telephone, and water and waste disposal programs, and the rural area development program.

Agriculture Department programs involving subsidized or free distributions of food may be considered, in their human resources aspects, to be oriented primarily to the betterment of health and secondarily to family support. Some, at least, promote education. But altogether these food programs, with their overtones of agricultural policy and marketing relationships, seem to fit also into the broad category of environmental improvement. Therefore they are discussed here.

The major commodity distribution program involves distribution annually of approximately half a billion dollars worth of food acquired under surplus removal and price support operations. The food is delivered to State agencies in the United States for distribution to some 25 million persons, mostly children, in school lunch programs, summer camps, institutions serving needy persons, Indian reservations, and needy families. It is used also to assist disaster victims.

Closely related are the special milk and school lunch programs, which together account for Federal expenditures of about \$300 million and non-Federal expenditures of substantially more than \$1 billion.

Also closely related is the food stamp program. Its objective is to improve diets in low-income families and to expand markets for domestically produced food by supplementing the food purchasing power of these families. Federal obligations for this program were estimated to rise from \$36 million in fiscal 1965 to \$150 million in fiscal 1967. State and local governments finance part of the administrative expense, but the free stamps are financed by the Federal Government. Stamps are sold to low-income families or individuals who are either receiving public assistance or are designated by local welfare officials as persons who need food assistance. The coupons they buy have a face value above their cost and are used, the same as money, to buy food in retail stores. The lower the family income, the greater is the amount of assistance provided. The average additional amount represented by free stamps is \$6 a month per person. A research study indicates that all sizes of retail food stores share in the additional sales. The number of participants and the amount of food purchasing assistance vary inversely with employment and general economic conditions. As unemployment increases, the volume of food stamps likewise increases. Economic reports issued by the Department deal with the impacts of the program on nutrition levels and retail sales, but broader economic repercussions apparently have not been measured, nor are estimates available to show the volume of non-Federal expenditures associated with the Federal outlays.

In identifying economic effects of the several food programs, the Department points out that the distributed commodities, food stamps, and low-priced milk and lunches enlarge the effective purchasing power of recipient families and contribute to better diets, and that resulting improvements in nutrition promote health and productivity. In the case of the special milk and school lunch programs, and foods distributed through the lunch program, the major benefit is reported to be